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SIR THOMAS BROWNE AND R. L. STEVENSON

It is a little strange that Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote so freely upon writing in general and his own writing in particular, should not have left more definite and specific record of the influence of the work of Sir Thomas Browne upon his own writing.[1] References to Browne are, of course, not utterly lacking in Stevenson; he is mentioned, for example, in the oft-quoted passage in "A College Magazine" in which Stevenson describes the method by which he learned to write. Browne is here, however, bracketed, in the group of writers to whom Stevenson played the sedulous ape, with Hazlitt, Lamb, Wordsworth, Defoe, Hawthorne, Montaigne, Beaudelaire and Obermann. It is true that Browne is spoken of again in the same paper, this time with Hazlitt and Ruskin, the last having cast upon him merely "a *passing* spell," as the inspiration of the successive drafts of "The Vanity of Morals"; but these "monkey tricks" are followed by others, in prose and verse, which take for their guiding stars as oddly assorted a group of writers as those first mentioned. It is to be noted that neither here nor elsewhere is Browne singled out for particular recognition as the primary influence in the formation for Stevenson's early style. Yet it is very much to be doubted if any one of the others could be shown to have anything like the direct influence which Browne exerted, upon the style which we think of as characteristically Stevensonian. The generous explanation—and with Stevenson the generous explanation is likely to be the correct one— is that Stevenson, conscious stylist though he was, was still not sensible of the extent or the precise direction of the influence of Browne.[1]

Leaving aside for the moment the question of style in the narrower sense, reasons why the work of Browne should have attracted Stevenson are not far to seek. The spiritual kinship is unmistakable. The Shorter Catechist who still could heap bitter invective upon the minister of his own sect who had

attacked the memory of Father Damien found a companionable spirit in the seventeenth century Anglican who "could never hear the Ave-Mary Bell without an elevation." It is of record, however, that Stevenson, after the Father Damien episode, deeply regretted having indulged in bitterness, even in this just cause.   Must he not have read with entire approval Browne's discussion of "that other Virtue of Charity, without which Faith is a mere notion, and of no existence?"   Even Charles Lamb, we recall, was moved to take exception, in "Imperfect Sympathies," to the entire lack of "common Antipathies" in Browne's profession.   Browne, indeed, allows but one limitation to his toleration: "My conscience would give me the lye if I should say I absolutely detest or hate any essence but the Devil;" and are we not justified in believing, to use a phrase of Carlyle's on another occasion, that "the very devil himself he cannot hate with right orthodoxy?"   In the case of Browne, as in that of Stevenson, the spirit of toleration belonged to a man upon occasion outwardly a skeptic, in matters of ritual, but one whose heart was deeply reverent; it is not, in either instance, the toleration of indifference.   Moreover, both men unite this trait with an unmistakable fondness for preaching; *Lay Morals* is perhaps Stevenson's nearest formal approach to *Religio Medici*, but, through his work, the lay preacher is seldom silenced for long at a time.

It is significant that Stevenson, speaking of Walt Whitman, as "not one of those who can be deceived by familiarity,"[2] should compare him with Sir Thomas Browne, to whom also life was "one perpetual miracle."   The spirit of universal curiosity expressed in his own nursery rhyme, "The world is so full of a number of things," is one which, very strikingly, Stevenson shares with Browne.   There is in each case, too, a thorough-going optimism in spite of a curious preoccupation with the thought of death.   The subject to which Sir Thomas Browne recurs again and again in *Religio Medici*, as well as in *Urn-Burial*, is that of man's mortality; and it is this theme which unfailingly inspires him to his loftiest manner.   The circumstance of life-long ill health made it inevitable that Stevenson

[2] *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, p. 92.   References to Stevenson are to the Biographical Edition.

too should recur often to this thought; but it is wholly remarkable that his treatment of the theme should, like Browne's, contain so little of what is morbid.

There is a keen temptation to pursue, in further detail, these and other parallels between the thought of Stevenson and that of Browne. We are concerned, however, rather with manner than with matter, though the two, naturally, cannot entirely be disassociated; Browne attracts Stevenson both as philosopher and as stylist. Stevenson, of course, has reiterated his belief that style is of primary importance in writing: "Style is of the essence of thinking;"[3] "Style is the invariable mark of any master."[4] Our purpose will be to limit our inquiry into the influence of Browne upon Stevenson, as closely as possible to the side of style rather than that of thought.

Parenthetically it may be said, that with the evidence which exists of Stevenson's familiarity with Browne, it is again surprising to observe that his discussion of "Books Which Have Influenced Me"[5] contains no mention of *Religio Medici* or any other work of Browne. The works here noted, in the order in which they are discussed, are Shakespeare, Dumas, Bunyan, the New Testament, Whitman, Herbert Spencer, Lewis' *Life of Goethe*, Marcus Aurelius, Wordsworth and George Meredith. Nevertheless we are warned that the list may have omitted important names: "I suppose, when I am done, I shall find that I have forgotten much that was most influential, as I see I have already forgotten Thoreau, and Hazlitt, whose paper 'On the Spirit of Obligations' was a turning point in my life, and Penn . . . and Mitford's *Tale of Old Japan*." If it was thus possible for Stevenson even temporarily to forget Hazlitt, to whom elsewhere he has paid such direct tribute of admiration, surely we may suspect that he has omitted other significant names, and that two of these names are Charles Lamb and Sir Thomas Browne.

Are the guiding principles of Stevenson's style, then, derived in any sense from Browne? In answering this question it will be convenient first to refer to Stevenson's theory of

[3] *Familiar Studies*. p. 104.
[4] "A Note on Realism," *Essays of Travel*, etc., p. 278.
[5] *Essays of Travel*, p. 317 ff.

style, and then to observe how far his practice conforms to his theory; at the same time, we shall inquire what both theory and practice have in common with the work of Sir Thomas Browne. Fortunately, Stevenson has discussed at length his theory of style, in the much debated article "On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature," contributed to *The Contemporary Review* for April, 1885.[6] The general principles of style there enumerated are discussed under four main heads: choice of words, the web, the rhythm of the phrase, the contents of the phrase. Each of these points demands separate consideration.

The first topic, choice of words, is dealt with briefly and in generalizations. Stevenson distinguishes the material with which the literary artist works from that which must be employed in other departments of creative art, and points out the advantage and the limitation arising from this difference. "The first merit," he believes, "which attracts in the pages of a good writer . . . is the apt choice and contrast of the words employed." Though the first merit, he holds that it is very far from being characteristic in equal degree of all good writers; indeed, writers who excel in this respect are likely to be inferior to the best in other aspects of style. Stevenson's phrasing of the principle actuating choice of words is noteworthy: "It is, indeed, a strange art to take these blocks, rudely conceived for the purpose of the market and the bar, and by tact of application touch them to the finest meanings and distinctions, restore to them their primal energy, wittily shift them to another issue, or make of them a drum to rouse the passions." It is precisely this point which Sir Walter Raleigh, in his suggestive analysis of Stevenson's own style, has selected as its first excellence: "a fine sense of the sound, value, meaning and associations of individual words."[7] Surely Stevenson's "careful choice of epithet and name" and his use of words in unusual and striking associations are traits which he shares with Browne. The allusiveness of a word, for example the last in this phrase, "Man's own reason is his best *Oedipus;*"[8] and the full flavor imparted to a word by employing it with a glance at its older

[6] Included in the volume *Essays of Travel*, etc., pp. 253-277.

[7] Raleigh, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, London, 1904, p. 33.

[8] *Religio Medici*, II, p. 327. References to Browne are to the Bohn edition, in 3 vols.

meaning, like Browne's "such *extravagant* and irregular heads as mine"[9]—these are to be paralleled again and again in Stevenson.[10]   The proof of influence cannot, of course, be made conclusive, because there are so many writers besides Browne in whom Stevenson may have studied the effective choice of words, and because his discussion of this point is confined to generalization.   Nevertheless certain aspects of Stevenson's choice of words, some of them associated with the other stylistic traits he discusses, recall Browne pre-eminently; and, in general, there can be no doubt that Browne belongs, in Stevenson's own classification, with the Montaignes and the Carlyles, peculiarly effective in the choice of individual words.

Choice of words is closely associated, naturally, with the aspect of style which forms the subject of the second point Stevenson discusses, what he calls "the web."   "The true business of the literary artist," he says,[11] "is to plait and weave his meaning, involving it around itself; so that each successive sentence, by successive phrases, shall first come into a kind of knot, and then, after a moment of suspended meaning, solve and clear itself.   In every properly constructed sentence there should be observed this knot or hitch; so that (however delicately) we are led to foresee, to expect, and then to welcome the successive phrases."   "The pleasure," he continues, "may be heightened by an element of surprise, as, very grossly, in the common figure of the antithesis, or, with much greater subtlety, where an antithesis is first suggested and then deftly evaded."   The last clause, and a statement a little later as to the propriety of inexact balance, might stand as the description of a favorite turn of phrase in Browne; for he, "with much greater subtlety" than the Euphuists, cultivated the purposely incomplete antithesis and intentionally imperfect balance. "I should violate my own arm rather than a Church; nor willingly deface the name of Saint or Martyr"[12] is an example; the reader's expectation of another "rather than" clause is pleasantly disappointed.   The famous last chapter of the

[9] *Religio Medici*, II, p. 327.
[10] Cf. Raleigh, pp. 34-36, for a number of examples, from *Virginibus*
[11] P. 257.
Puerisque, of "happy hits and subtle implications conveyed in a single word."
[12] *Religio Medici*, II, p. 321.

Urn-Burial abounds in sentences made up of deliberately asymmetrical clauses.[13]   A single example from Stevenson may be used to illustrate his employment of this type of sentence: "To be overwise is to ossify; and the scruple-monger ends by standing stockstill."[14]   Here the vowel and consonantal alliteration,[15] joined with the inexact balance of the clauses,[16] give us Sir Thomas Browne to the life.

Stevenson's early essays, those collected in *Virginibus Puerisque*, for example, are full of sentences composed on the principle he enunciates of the "successive phrase," foreseen and expected.   To vary the two-clause balanced sentence, we frequently encounter, as also in Browne, happy use of the "magic number three," the successive phrases usually arranged in climactic order.   "I thank the goodness of God, I have no sins that want a name; I am not singular in offences; my transgressions are Epidemical, and from the common breath of our corruption."[17]   This sentence will illustrate the type in

[13] The first sentence (III, p. 40-1) is a case in point.

[14] "Aes Triplex," in *Virginibus Puerisque*, p. 159.

[15] For the more elaborate use of vowel alliteration in Browne, cf. *Urn-Burial*, III, p. 47, "invisibly interred by angels and adjudged to obscurity"; and p. 37, "in old apprehension unworthy of the earth."

[16] It is characteristic of Browne to suggest, and then carefully avoid exact balance of clauses. "To be nameless in worthy deeds, exceeds an infamous history" (*Urn-Burial*, p. 44) illustrates, in brief, this favorite turn of phrase. Professor Croll, in the introduction to his edition of Lyly's *Euphues* (London, 1916, p. xvii) points out that Browne's more subtly patterned balance is one of the stylistic traits that place him (with Bacon and with Montaigne, among others) in "the Anti-Ciceronian movement which arose at the end of the 16th century in reaction from the various forms of ornate, formal style in the preceding age, such as Euphuism. . . . Sir Thomas Browne . . . likes just so much symmetry of form as will serve to point his artful and rhythmical departures from it." Professor Croll has called my attention to a striking analysis, by Charles Lamb, of a similar trait in the prose of Thomas Fuller: "The charm of it [a passage from Fuller's account of Henry de Essex in his *Worthies*] seems to consist in a perpetual balance of antitheses not too violently opposed, and the constant activity of mind in which the reader is kept. . . The reader by this artifice is taken into a kind of partnership with the writer—his judgment is exercised in settling the preponderance—he feels as if he were consulted as to the issue." (A note to Lamb's *Specimens from Fuller's Writings*, p. 385, of vol. II, Talfourd ed., New York, 1855.)

[17] *Religio Medici*, II, p. 434. Cf., further, p. 403, "I can hardly think . . ." or pp. 438-9, "For there is a musick. . ."

Browne. Examples may be added of sentences from Stevenson which parallel the clause construction and have something too of Browne's rhythm, different as they are in subject matter: "They are dreams and unsubstantial; visions of style that repose upon no base of hidden meaning; the last heart-throbs of that excited amateur who has to die in all of us before the artist can be born."[18] "Cattle awake in the meadows; sheep break their fast on dewy hillsides, and change to a new lair among the ferns; and houseless men, who have lain down with the fowls, open their dim eyes and behold the beauty of the night."[19]

Stevenson's discussion of the "web" leads him inevitably to the conclusion, with which, of course, all his writing is consistent, that "style is the foundation of the art of literature."[20] Moreover, "that style is the most perfect, not, as fools say, which is the most natural, for the most natural is the disjointed babble of the chronicler; but which attains the highest degree of elegant and pregnant implication unobtrusively; or if obtrusively, then with the greatest gain to sense and vigour." The last phrase of this dictum might well have been added to bring Sir Thomas Browne within the definition: for Browne's style (and Stevenson's own) cannot fairly be described as "unobtrusive."

The last two points of Stevenson's discussion of technical elements of style are concerned with the rhythm of the phrase and the contents of the phrase. The conclusion as to rhythm in prose is, "Prose may be rhythmical, and it may be as much so as you will; but it must not be metrical. It may be anything but it must not be verse."[21] Dickens "in his earlier attempts to be impressive" is the stock illustration used by Stevenson (and others) to typify prose-writing which trespasses upon the domain of verse. Stevenson's own practice in this particular once more may be said to recall that of Sir Thomas Browne. The concluding chapter of *Urn-Burial*, by common consent, affords the supreme example in all English literature of the "other harmony of prose." To give a single example, ". . . the glory of the world is surely over, and the earth in ashes

[18] "Fontainebleau," in *Across the Plains*, p. 133.
[19] *Travels with a Donkey*, p. 112.
[20] P. 259.
[21] P. 267.

unto them:"[22] these words surely border close upon the confines of poetry, but are true nevertheless to their own medium. The following examples from *Virginibus Puerisque* will demonstrate rhythmical prose in Stevenson: "Wise men of yore erected statues of their deities, and consciously performed their part in life before those marble eyes,"[23] and (with the closing phrases containing mingled suggestion of Shakespeare and Browne) "Times are changed for him who marries; there are no more by-path meadows, where you may innocently linger, but the road lies long and straight and dusty to the grave."[24] Occasionally Stevenson comes perilously close to suggesting the sustained iambic metre, inappropriate, according to his own theory, to prose; the closing sentence of this essay on "Technical Elements of Style" is "Wĕ neēd nŏt wŏndĕr, thēn, ĭf pērfĕct sēntĕncēs ăre rāre, ănd pērfĕct pāgĕs rārĕr." Nevertheless, the fact that in Stevenson, prose-rhythm is often more obvious and less subtle than in Browne,[25] does not militate against the belief that the latter's work, in this particular also, strongly influenced the former's.

Under his final topic, "the contents of the phrase," Stevenson is chiefly concerned with assonance and alliteration: "The beauty of the contents of a phrase, or of a sentence, depends implicitly upon alliteration and assonance." Here it is especially difficult to believe that the prose of Sir Thomas Browne, though not represented in the selections quoted to illustrate the point, is not in Stevenson's mind. The matter has already been touched upon, and will be referred to again, but perhaps a single illustration may be given here of Stevenson's use of alliteration: "The chair he has just been besieging as a castle, or valiantly cutting to the ground as a dragon, is taken away for the accommodation of a morning visitor, and he is nothing abashed; he can skirmish by the hour with a stationary coal scuttle; in the midst of the enchanted pleasance, he can see, without sensible

[22] III, p. 49.

[23] P. 32.

[24] P. 30.

[25] For examples (from the multitude which might be cited) of prose in which rhythm is kept from being metre, see *R. M.*, p. 444, "There is a piece of divinity in us . . . and owes no homage unto the sun"; and p. 402, "The heart of man is the place the devils dwell in . . . Legion is revived in me."

shock, the gardener soberly digging potatoes for the day's dinner."[26] Here, to analyze the sentence after Stevenson's own manner in "Technical Elements," we find the "s" sound predominating throughout; the "c" which furnishes subsidiary alliteration in the early part of the sentence is replaced in this capacity, toward the close, by "d." This may be placed alongside the following passage from Browne: "The solemnities, ceremonies, rites of their cremation or interment, so solemnly delivered by authors, we shall not disparage our readers to repeat. Only the last and lasting part in their urns, collected bones and ashes, we cannot wholly omit, or decline that subject, which occasion lately presented, in some discovered among us."[27] Here the prevailing alliteration is the "r" sound, strongly supported throughout by the ever-present "s." It may be that there are other and more subtle effects to be found here also, a manipulation, for instance, of the vowels in order to emphasize flat "a" and close "o"; this would demonstrate, merely, what may be taken as a premise, that Browne is a more delicate artist in sound-values than Stevenson.[28]

[26] "Child's Play," in *Virginibus Puerisque*, p. 219.

[27] *Urn-Burial*, III, p. 13.

[28] Browne's use of alliteration is a large subject at which we have merely glanced. It varies in kind and in degree from a relatively simple to a highly complex type; it is to the former kind, naturally, that Stevenson's practice more nearly conforms. This sentence of Stevenson's, "The past stands on a precarious footing; another straw split in the field of metaphysic, and behold us robbed of it." ("A Chapter on Dreams," *Across the Plains*, p. 206) with its alternating "p" and "s," supported first by "f" and then by "b," illustrates about as elaborate use as Stevenson ever makes of alliteration. Of the same general type are such sentences of Browne's as this: "But that these phantasms appear often, and do frequent cemeteries, charnel-houses and churches, it is because those are the dormitories of the dead, where the devil, like an insolent champion, beholds with pride the spoils and trophies of his victory over Adam." (*Religio Medici*, p. 380). The more intricate and subtle use of alliteration and the long drawn out harmony less characteristic of *Religio Medici* than of *Urn-Burial* may be illustrated in a paragraph from the latter (p. 37), "We examine not the old laws of sepulture . . . from whence there was no redemption," where the pattern "pr" is maintained throughout, and aided by minor harmonies, successively "x," "b," "f," "m," besides a phrase of vowel alliteration. For further illustration of the simpler type, see *Urn-Burial*, p. 48, "When many that feared to die . . . and annihilations shall be courted"; and, for the more complex type, p. 33, "Christians have handsomely glossed the deformity of death . . . most pathetically ceremonious." The former kind of alliteration is

That Stevenson had an early fondness for the simpler and more direct prose of the 18th century writers may be inferred, among other indications, from his remarks on alliteration in an early bit of critical writing.   Speaking, in 1874, of Lord Lytton's *Fables in Song*, he writes, "We must take exception . . . to the excess of alliteration.   Alliteration is so liable to be abused that we can scarcely be too sparing of it; and yet it is a trick that grows upon a writer with years.   It is a pity to see fine verses, such as some in 'Demos,' absolutely spoiled by the recurrence of one wearisome consonant."[29]   The character of much of his earliest work, such as "The Pentland Rising" (1866) and "College Papers" (1871),[30] seems to support the conclusion that his early theory and practice was based more on Addison than on Browne.   There is, however, direct reference to *Religio Medici* in "The Wreath of Immortelles" (1870);[31] one wonders whether the increasing influence of Browne upon Stevenson, becoming obvious, as the attempt will be made to show, in Stevenson's first published work of importance,[32] does not in part account for his change of heart as regards alliteration.   In the essay on style, he writes, "It used to be a piece of good advice to all young writers to avoid alliteration; and the advice was sound, in so far as it prevented daubing. None the less for that, was it abominable nonsense, and the mere raving of those blindest of the blind who will not see."

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frequent in all Browne's writing; for examples outside his two best known works, cf. *Vulgars Errors*, II, p. 286, "Surely, if such depravities there be yet alive, deformity need not despair; nor will the eldest hopes be ever superannuated, since death hath spurs, and carcasses have been courted"; and *Letter to a Friend*, III, pp. 77-8, "Not to fear death, nor desire it, was short of his resolution: to be dissolved, and be with Christ, was his dying ditty."

Whether, however, Browne's alliteration is comparatively simple or extremely intricate, it is to be noted that it does not take the obvious form characteristic of Euphuism, where it is so frequently joined with exact balance of clauses.   Browne's attitude toward alliteration is as different from Lyly's as is his use of antithesis. (cf. p. 375 above). In this respect, too, Browne departs from the formal oratorical style of the Ciceronian school; Seneca, rather than Cicero, is his model.

[29] *Lay Morals*, p. 164.

[30] Both included in *Lay Morals and Other Papers*.

[31] *Lay Morals*, p. 195.

[32] *Virginibus Puerisque, An Inland Voyage* and *Travels with a Donkey* all belong to the years 1878-1881.

One other point of resemblance between Browne and Stevenson may be mentioned, a minor stylistic device not commented on in the essay on style. This is Stevenson's use of what seems peculiarly a Brownism, the quaint arrangement of pairs of words alike in sound, though often varying in sense. Frequently these pairs take the form of different derivatives of the same stem, the likeness of sound pleasantly calling attention to the differences. These are examples in Browne: "Time which *antiquates antiquities* . . . hath yet spared these *minor monuments*."[33] "While some have *studied* monuments, others have *studiously* declined them."[34] ". . . the *smartest* strokes of affliction leave but short *smart* upon us."[35] In the following sentence from "Child's Play," this device is joined, in the second clause, with alliteration; and the whole (indeed much of the first part of the essay) exhibits the inexact balance cultivated by Browne: "What we lose in *generous* impulse, we more than gain in the habit of *generously* watching others; and the capacity to enjoy *S*hakespeare may balance a lost aptitude for playing at *s*oldiers."[36] Very similar is this sentence from "Aes Triplex,"[37] surely with the authentic accent of Browne: "The *p*oorest *p*ersons have a bit of *p*ageant going to the tomb; *memorial* stones are set up over the least *memorable*." Still more striking is another phrase from the same essay: "By the time a man gets well into the seventies, his continued existence is a *mere miracle*."[38] In this instance, beyond any question, he is recalling an idea of Browne's to which he has alluded elsewhere.[39] The phrase in Browne, however, runs thus: "Now for my life, it is a miracle of thirty years."[40] Is it not significant that, in the very act of recalling this, Stevenson should fall into a characteristic Brownism?

It may not be out of place to join to the foregoing analysis of Stevenson's theory of style, as exemplified in his practice, the

[33] *Urn-Burial*, III, p. 41.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[35] P. 45.

[36] *Virginibus Puerisque*, p. 211.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

[38] P. 150.

[39] "His whole life is to him what it was to Sir Thomas Browne, one perpetual miracle." "Walt Whitman," *Familiar Studies*, p. 92.

[40] *Religio Medici*, II, p. 444.

caveat that it be not applied too broadly to his method of writing. Even so hostile a critic as Mr. Swinnerton acknowledges that injustice has been done Stevenson in this direction: "Because Stevenson found certain combinations of consonants recurrent in select passages, it was assumed by his critics that he lived in a state of the dreariest kind of pattern-writing."[41] Beyond any question, Stevenson was a most conscientious craftsman; the proofs of this are too familiar to need rehearsal. He was a man of letters, by his own testimony and that of others, who wrote always with care, often with difficulty. In the very last year of his life he told S. R. Crockett, how, having spent twenty-one days of at least seven working hours each on *The Ebb Tide* and *Weir of Hermiston*, he had completed exactly twenty-four pages. All this does not imply, however, that he subjected his own writing to the minute analysis of style and rhythm which he applies to the passages selected for this purpose in the essay on style. Have we not, in Sir Thomas Browne's case, though Browne is so much less prolific an author, a writer who is meticulous in much the same degree as Stevenson? In regard to Browne's manner of writing Edmund Gosse remarks, "The examination of his numerous manuscripts is enough to show with what care he ran over the texture of his sentences, weighing them down with precious metal, fusing, elaborating, and implicating them, turning the rough yarn of statement into heavy cloth of gold."[42]

The illustrations of specific points of resemblance to the style of Sir Thomas Browne, it will have been perceived, have been confined usually to the essays of Stevenson's youth. It is not surprising, for more than one reason, that the influence of Browne should grow perceptibly less and less in the works of Stevenson's later years. Obviously, even in so relatively early a work as *Treasure Island*, written "as the words come and the pen will scratch,"[43] there is little place for "fine writing." Though we must not exclude all the novels and certainly not all the short stories, it is still true that the Brownisms are primarily to be noticed in the earlier writer and in the essayist. One

[41] Frank Swinnerton, *R. L. Stevenson, A Critical Study*, London, 1914, p. 85.

[42] *Sir Thomas Browne*, E. M. L., p. 192.

[43] Letter to W. E. Henley, August, 1881.

explanation is suggested by the author himself, his belief, that is to say, that style, in the narrower technical sense and in the larger as well, should not be formed once and for all, and for all purposes alike, in a writer's youth: "Artists of indifferent energy and an imperfect devotion to their own ideal make this ungrateful effort once for all; and, having formed a style, adhere to it through life. But those of a higher order cannot rest content with a process which, as they continue to employ it, must infallibly degenerate towards the academic and the cut and dried . . . the changing views which accompany the growth of their experience are marked by still more sweeping alterations in the manner of their art."[44]

Apart from this, it is natural that in the personal essay, above other places, the note of Browne should be heard. Browne (particularly because of the second part of *Religio Medici*) deserves to be reckoned as an important link in the chain by which the tradition of Montaigne was handed down to the 19th century, to Lamb and to Stevenson before all others. Though never able entirely to keep himself out of his writing, it is indisputable that Stevenson, as he matures, draws less and less upon his personal experiences. Professor Rice, commenting upon a different spirit in the latter half of Stevenson's writing life, selects the year 1880 as a dividing line.[45] Does not what he refers to as "the diminution of the autobiographic temper" assist us in explaining the lessening influence of Sir Thomas Browne, pre-eminently a subjective writer? It may be said, however, that although toward the end the echoes of Browne grow fainter and fainter, they never are utterly silenced.

After all this attempt to demonstrate specifically the stylistic indebtedness of Stevenson to Browne, one is conscious that a large part of the indebtedness defies such a demonstration. Critics have found Browne's peculiar quality extremely difficult to analyze satisfactorily. Sir Leslie Stephen, inquiring into "the strange charm of Sir Thomas Browne's style," is forced to the conclusion, that "like other spells . . . it is incommunicable: no real answer can be given even by critics who,

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[44] "A Note on Realism," *Essays of Travel*, p. 282.
[45] Richard A. Rice, *Stevenson—How to Know Him*, Indianapolis, 1916, p. 156.

like Coleridge and De Quincey, show something of the same power. . . The perusal of a page will make us recognize what could not be explained in a whole volume of analysis."[46] Similarly we may say that the note of Browne in Stevenson is frequently easy to perceive, difficult to classify. Such random phrases as these: (of a drum made of asses' hide) "in this state of mummy and melancholy survival of itself,"[47] or (of the Camisard warriors) "mystically putting a grain of wheat among the pewter balls,"[48] recall Sir Thomas Browne irresistibly; precisely why, it is more difficult to state.

The conclusion to which we are led is that Stevenson, coming in his youth to take Sir Thomas Browne as a model for style, to an extent greater than he realized, never relinquished allegiance to his master, though his tribute becomes less and less servile as he grows in stature. Always a stylist, the great 17th century stylist continues to attract him, particularly, as has been suggested, when a solemn theme congenial to Browne's manner is touched upon. It is recognized, of course, on all sides, that the "style" which he cultivated early in life became a permanent characteristic of his work, though it becomes less obtrusive in his more mature writing. "There is an indescribable air of distinction," thus Sir Walter Raleigh summarizes the matter, ". . . breathing from all his works."[49] Mr. Swinnerton, in his less gracious manner, puts it in this way: "Having turned writer in his youth, he remained a writer to the end. He could not dictate a letter but what the phrases ran in accustomed grooves, half way to the tropes of his covenanting manner."[50] It has been the attempt of the present essay to show that there is one writer, among the "older masters" of English prose, who has helped, in more definite ways than it has been supposed, in the formation of Stevenson's style.

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[46] *Hours in a Library*, II, p. 34.
[47] *An Inland Voyage*, p. 71.
[48] *Travels with a Donkey*, p. 127.
[49] *Op. cit.*, p. 43.
[50] *Op. cit.*, p. 150.